

# News and Updates on the Fort River



You are receiving this email because of your interest in the Fort River Watershed Association and our work. Please let us know if your interests have changed by replying to this email. Thanks for your support of healthy rivers in our community!

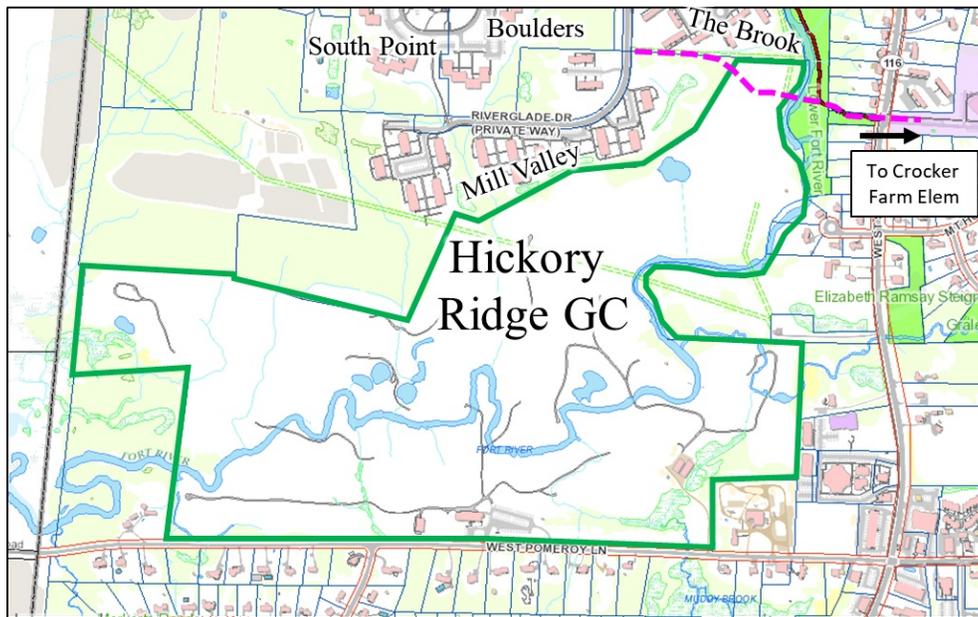
## UPDATE: Hickory Ridge Golf Club



### OVERVIEW:

Hickory Ridge is a private golf club in the heart of the Fort River watershed in South Amherst. Due to declining membership and budget shortfalls, the current owner is interested in selling the property. The Town of Amherst, after a year of discussion with the owner and regional partners, has entered into a purchase and sale agreement to buy the property and plans to use most of the

land for conservation.



## Here are some questions that you might have about the project:

*Will any of the 150 acres be developed?*

**Yes.** The purchase and sale agreement allows for a 20-40 year lease of 25 acres of the property to install solar energy collection panels. Also, there are roughly 8 acres along West Pomeroy Lane, including the golf club's existing buildings, that will be considered for possible other uses.

*How much will this project cost?*

**The town intends to make this purchase "revenue neutral".** This means that up front and operational costs are made up for with revenue generated from the property. The purchase price agreed to is \$520,000. Future revenue sources include: (1) PILOT payments from the solar development that will range from approximately \$45-\$60,000 annually; (2) the town may sell up to 8 acres along West Pomeroy Lane for residential or commercial development, with a goal of furthering the commercial density at Pomeroy Corners.

All questions about future use of the property will be considered through a community master planning process with town staff, committee and boards, and local and regional stakeholders (**that's us, watershed neighbors**).

*What is the conservation value of the property?*

**Access to natural spaces.** Hickory Ridge borders two large neighborhoods that currently lack good access to nature: Orchard Valley, and East Hadley Road complexes (Brook, Mill, Boulders, South Point). Trails through the property would allow for walking, bike riding, and access to fishing and swimming. Furthermore, trails could connect neighborhoods off East Hadley Road to Crocker Farm Elementary School and Pomeroy Village Center.

**Ecological benefits.** The Fort River winds 1.5 miles lazily through the Hickory Ridge property, presenting a once-in-a-lifetime opportunity to restore a huge reach of the river. Concentrated efforts to restore and protect the riverbank and would enhance the health of the entire ecosystem and species living it, including endangered species like the dwarf wedgemussel and wood turtle. The ecology of the river would benefit immensely from restored riverbanks and increased vegetative cover along its course.

***Have other questions about the project?***

***Email us at [fortriverwatershed@gmail.com](mailto:fortriverwatershed@gmail.com), and we'll see what can do to find an answer!***



A flooded bridge at Hickory Ridge hints at the opportunity to restore floodplain environments there. These areas can reduce downstream flooding, improve water quality, and foster unique and valuable ecosystems.

## **Fearing Brook Project for Cleaner Water in the Fort River**

The Town of Amherst has received \$276,000 in grant funds from the U.S. Environmental Protection Agency towards improvements on Fearing Brook, a (mostly underground) stream that transports storm water and surface water runoff from about half of downtown Amherst

in to the Fort River.

The improvement project on the Fearing Brook is designed to reconnect the Brook to its natural floodplains, an area of land currently being managed for conservation by the Town on Amherst.

Floodplains are areas bordering a river or brook that naturally provide space for retention of flood and rain water. When excess water from flooding events or heavy rains travels across a watershed, any number of contaminants can be picked up by the water and drain directly in to rivers and brooks. This non-point source pollution - contaminants that come from many places and collectively have a negative impact on the environment - can be reduced by restoring floodplains and their connections to waterways.

**Healthy floodplains that are connected to rivers and brooks offer many benefits to help keep rivers healthy and water clean, such as:**

- Surface water runoff can be stored and filtered by soils and floodplain plants. This reduces the amount of nutrients, bacteria and sediment that are deposited in to the river.
- Excess water flow is slowed down, decreasing the erosion and movement of soil and sediment in to the river.
- Water stored in floodplains has a chance to infiltrate in to the ground, replacing water in underground aquifers and recharge groundwater.
- Floodplains help maintain healthy riparian and freshwater habitats, which are necessary for wildlife and fish.
- Excess water that is able to pool in floodplains drastically reduce flooding risks and damages downstream.



Fearing Brook flows into the Fort River just upstream of popular recreation spots on the river (Jump Bridge, Groff Park), ultimately flowing to the Connecticut River. By reconnecting the Fearing Brook

to its natural floodplain, and ensuring the water flowing in to Fearing Brook is cleaner, this project will benefit the health of the Fort River and Connecticut River watersheds.

This grant project allows our local and regional officials to protect and enhance the health of our watershed and everything living in it from sources of non-point source water pollution.

*To read more about the project, check out Scott Merzbach's article from the Amherst Bulletin (Oct 31, 2019) here:*

<https://www.amherstbulletin.com/Amherst-lands-grant-to-reduce-Fort-River-contamination-29848574>

**Have updates on what's happening in the watershed?**

*Please send us your local Fort River news at  
[fortriverwatershed@gmail.com](mailto:fortriverwatershed@gmail.com).*

## Conway School to Conduct Fort River Watershed Assessment

A student team from The Conway School will be conducting a broad-scale ecological assessment of the Fort River Watershed to be completed by spring of 2020. Using geospatial data, feedback collected during community meetings, and one-one one interviews they will:

- determine whether there are areas of vulnerability within the watershed and map them;
- investigate the impact of land use on water quality;
- identify current conservation efforts and where they overlap; and
- identify areas for future conservation that could improve water quality of the Fort River, increase ecological connectivity, support wildlife habitat, and provide recreational access to the community.

**Have question about the project, or data to contribute?**

*Contact the student team at [FortRiver2020@csl.edu](mailto:FortRiver2020@csl.edu)*

*The Conway School is a graduate program in ecological landscape design and planning. The school's mission is to explore, develop, practice, and teach design of the land that is ecologically and socially sustainable. For more information, visit [csld.edu](http://csld.edu), give us a call (413-369-4044), or send us an email ([info@csld.edu](mailto:info@csld.edu)).*

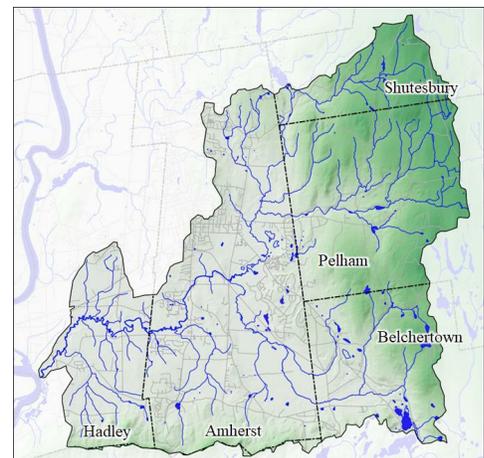
## #FortRiverFacts

The Fort River is the longest Massachusetts tributary of the Connecticut River with free passage for fish and other species. Our community impacts the health of the river and the species living in it. It's a biological treasure in our backyards and we're excited to celebrate it!

Drink water here? The Fort River feeds the drinking water supply for Amherst through 2 reservoirs. The Fort River watershed (the river and the land that drains in to it) run through parts of Amherst, Shutesbury, Pelham, Belchertown and Hadley.

The Fort River is home to several species of freshwater mussel, including one species federally listed as being endangered - the dwarf wedgemussel. Mussels are extremely sensitive to pollution and degraded water quality.

**Map of the Fort River watershed**



Promote Access • Education  
• Advocacy • Science

*Environmentally Active*

Sincerely,

your neighbors at the  
Fort River Watershed Association



The Fort River Watershed Association has partnered with the Connecticut River Conservancy, a local non-profit organization advocating for the Connecticut River watershed since 1952. This working partnership makes us both more effective advocates for our rivers.

For more information on the Connecticut River Conservancy, please visit their website: [www.ctriver.org](http://www.ctriver.org)



Connecticut River  
Conservancy

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STAY CONNECTED

